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Why Do Media Uncritically Cite US-Based Muslim Lobbying Group CAIR?

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The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is no stranger to controversy. The organization bills itself as helping to promote the understanding of Islam, protect civil rights and empower American Muslims. However, since its inception in 1994, it has been dogged with allegations of antisemitism (https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/docume international/israel--middle-east/Profile-The-Council-on-American-Islamic-Relations.pdf); it was proven to have links to a group convicted of channelling funds to Hamas (https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/docume international/israel--middle-east/Profile-The-Council-on-American-Islamic-Relations.pdf), and its co-founder has

promoted anti-Israel conspiracy theories (https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/docume international/israel--middle-east/Profile-The-Council-on-American-Islamic-Relations.pdf). Yet, despite these years of scandals, numerous media outlets seem to have no problem using CAIR as its go-to authority on anything related to Muslims in the United States.

Just this week, *CNN* reported on a CAIR press release that alleged there had been a spike in Islamophobic incidents this year under the headline, "*Advocacy group publishes mid-year report highlighting spike in anti-Muslim crimes and bias* (https://edition.cnn.com/2021/07/25/us/cair-anti-muslim-incidents-trnd/index.html)." According to Washington, D.C.-based CAIR,

there were “500 complaints of anti-Muslim bias incidents between January and July 2021 alone,” which included “hate crimes, harassment, school bullying, discrimination, hate speech, and anti-mosque incidents.”

In the preface to its recent snapshot, CAIR claims there was an “uptick” in anti-Muslim bias during the Israel-Hamas conflict in May, citing four mosque incidents and several physical assaults. The use of the word “alone” when presenting its figures for the seven-month period implies this year has been uniquely, or particularly, bad for American Muslims. However, CAIR’s own figures for 2020 show it received 6,144 complaints of similar types of bias – an average of 512 per month. CAIR does not offer any numbers that support this alleged

increase in Islamophobia during the Gaza conflict, but *CNN* is still content to say there was a “spike” in such crimes anyway.

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Considering its vague stats on the apparent surge in anti-Muslim hate, it is ironic that following the Anti-Defamation League's report (https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/preliminary-adl-data-reveals-uptick-in-antisemitic-incidents-linked-to-recent) into antisemitism during the same period, CAIR took to publishing platform Medium to describe the ADL's figures as "at best, mischaracterized, and at worst, simply incorrect." On reporting the ADL's stats, *The Insider* also opted to include CAIR's unsupported allegations in its headline.

The Insider's article from July 10, *The ADL says violence in Israel and Palestine caused a rise in antisemitism. Critics, including CAIR, have said the statistics are misleading*

(https://www.insider.com/adl-israel-palestine-conflict-increased-antisemitism-some-disagree-2021-7), states:

> ***"For example, instances where demonstrators (https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/blank) chanted 'Intifada!' and 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free' across the street from the Temple Beth Israel synagogue in Skokie, IL,' were listed as antisemitic."***

While the publication notes there were a number of critics who disputed the ADL's figures in its headline, it does not offer any more information on who they might be. It appears the reference to multiple critics is

an attempt to add more credibility to CAIR's claim that the ADL was disingenuous with its statistics.

The media has even gone further than simply uncritically publishing CAIR press releases and using the organization as a rent-a-quote source. In 2019, *The Washington Post* published a 'fact checker' (https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019 people-did-something-rep-omars-remarks-context/) article after remarks made by Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) during a speech at CAIR's Annual Banquet were criticized:

> ***CAIR is not a terrorist organization, but an aggressive Muslim civil liberties organization, modeled on the Anti-Defamation League. The US government has never charged it with terrorism, but it was named as an 'unindicted co-conspirator or joint venturer' in the Holy Land Foundation case — an Islamic charity that in 2008 was convicted of funding Islamist militant groups."***

The piece then goes on to explain that CAIR and nearly 250 other organizations and individuals were also named in the case (https://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionImage which resulted in numerous people who ran the now-defunct Islamic charity the Holy

Land Foundation being convicted of sending millions of dollars to Hamas. It adds that CAIR's association with "groups later deemed to have links to terrorism predated any official US designation."

The fact-checker article, however, totally omits one particularly inconvenient fact: that the co-founder of CAIR's Dallas, Texas, chapter Ghassan Elashi was sentenced to 65 years in prison for his role in the Holy Land Foundation case. Nor does the article acknowledge that the FBI severed all ties with CAIR (https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2013/e0707r-summary.pdf) after "evidence at the trial linked [its] leaders to Hamas." The bureau

has since maintained a policy of no non-investigative interactions with the organization.

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A story published by *The Hill (https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/5 prominent-muslim-group-to-boycott-white-house-eid-celebration-over)* on May 15 quotes at length CAIR National Executive Director Nihad Awad following the decision by the group and others to boycott the White House's annual Eid celebration. In what can only be described as anti-Israel screed, Awad describes Israel as being ruled by an "apartheid government" that engages in "indiscriminate bombing" of Palestinians. *The Hill* does not offer any kind of context for Awad's wild assertions, such as the patently untrue claim that Israel non-selectively bombs the Gaza Strip. Awad also has a long history of peddling antisemitic and anti-Israeli conspiracy theories, including claims

the Jewish state has "corrupted" US political leaders (https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/docume international/israel--middle-east/Profile-The-Council-on-American-Islamic-Relations.pdf) and suggested a pro-Israel lobby controls American policy.

Related Reading — The Halo Effect and the Media: Why Trust Should Never Be Blind (https://honestreporting.com/news-literacy-the-halo-effect/)

These are just a few examples of the authoritative voice CAIR is granted in the media. Honestreporting's own data shows the organization has been referred to no fewer than 508 times in the press in the last

30 days alone. Between January 2021 and the time of publishing this article, CAIR received 11,700 media mentions.

These outlets should consider the organization's checkered history before uncritically using its leaders as sources.

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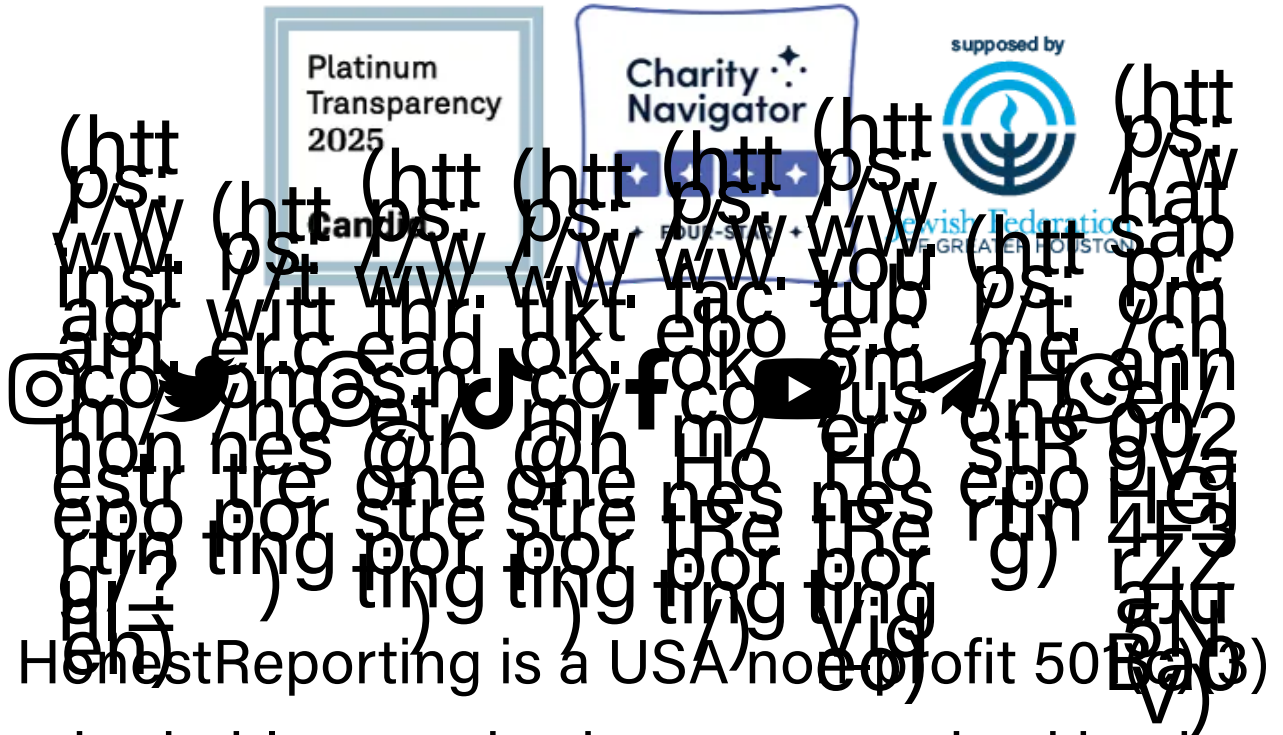

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